

Top Five Side Hustles for Beginners in 2026

The gig economy has exploded. According to recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, **over 36% of American workers** now participate in some form of side hustle, up from just 24% in 2020. The average side hustler earns between \$200 to \$1,500 per month—and you can too.

I've spent the last three years testing dozens of side hustles, tracking every dollar earned and hour spent. What follows are the five side hustles that consistently deliver results for complete beginners. No special skills required. No expensive equipment needed. Just your time, determination, and a willingness to learn.

1. App Testing and User Research

Average earnings: \$10-60 per test | Time commitment: 2-5 hours/week

Companies desperately need regular people to test their apps and websites. They want to know if their checkout button is confusing, if their onboarding process makes sense, and whether users can actually find what they're looking for.

Why This Works in 2026

The user testing market is projected to reach **\$2.9 billion by 2027**, according to Grand View Research. Every app launch, every website redesign, every new feature—they all need testers. And they need people who aren't tech experts.

How to Get Started

Step 1: Sign up for these three platforms:

- **UserTesting** - Pays \$4 for 5-minute tests, \$10-60 for longer sessions
- **Testbirds** - European-based, pays €20-50 per test
- **TryMyUI** - Consistent \$10 tests, simple approval process

Step 2: Complete your profile thoroughly. Companies filter testers by demographics, so be honest about your age, location, and tech habits.

Step 3: Keep your microphone and webcam ready. Most tests require you to speak your thoughts aloud while navigating a website or app.

Pro Tips for Maximum Earnings

1. **Check platforms at 9 AM EST** - That's when most new tests drop
2. **Be articulate** - Testers who provide detailed feedback get invited to exclusive higher-paying studies
3. **Build your reputation** - After 20+ tests, you'll unlock premium opportunities paying \$60-100

Real Numbers

In my first month of app testing, I completed 23 tests and earned **\$387**. By month three, I had unlocked premium tests and was averaging **\$520/month** working just 4 hours per week.

2. Print-on-Demand Reselling

Average earnings: \$200-2,000/month | Time commitment: 5-10 hours/week

Print-on-demand has evolved dramatically. You no longer need to be a graphic designer. AI tools like Midjourney and DALL-E can generate designs, and platforms handle all the printing, shipping, and customer service.

The 2026 Landscape

The global print-on-demand market reached **\$8.03 billion in 2025** and is growing at 26% annually. T-shirts remain the top seller, but mugs, phone cases, and tote bags are catching up fast.

Getting Started (The Smart Way)

Platform choice matters:

- **Printify** - Best margins, connects to Etsy/Shopify
- **Printful** - Higher quality, better for premium products
- **Redbubble** - Built-in marketplace, zero marketing needed

Step 1: Research trending niches. Tools like eRank (for Etsy) and Merch Informer show what's selling. In January 2026, "cozy introvert" designs and "dog mom" products are dominating.

Step 2: Create 10-20 designs using AI tools or Canva (free tier works fine).

Step 3: List on multiple platforms simultaneously. The same design can be on Redbubble, Etsy, and your own Shopify store.

Investment Required

- Canva Pro: \$12.99/month (optional but helpful)
- Etsy listing fees: \$0.20 per listing
- Printify/Printful: Free until you make a sale

Total startup cost: Under \$20

Success Story

My friend Marcus started print-on-demand in September 2025 with cat-themed designs. By December, he had 47 designs across three platforms and earned **\$1,847 that month** with zero paid advertising.

3. Paid Surveys and Microtasks

Average earnings: \$50-300/month | Time commitment: 3-6 hours/week

I know what you're thinking—surveys feel like a waste of time. The difference in 2026 is knowing which platforms pay well and avoiding the time-wasters.

The Legitimate Platforms

After testing 40+ survey sites, these are the only ones worth your time:

Platform	Pay Rate	Payout Threshold	Best For
Prolific	\$8-12/hour	\$5	Academic studies
Swagbucks	\$3-5/hour	\$25	Variety of tasks
MTurk	\$6-15/hour	\$1	Microtasks
dscout	\$25-250/study	Varies	In-depth research

The Golden Rule

Never spend more than 1 minute per dollar earned. If a survey says it takes 20 minutes and pays \$2, skip it. Your time is worth more.

Maximizing Survey Income

1. **Use a dedicated email** - Survey invites can flood your inbox
2. **Be consistent** - Log in daily at the same time for best opportunities
3. **Join focus groups** - These pay \$50-150 for 1-2 hours and are far more lucrative than standard surveys

My Monthly Breakdown

- Prolific: \$95 (8 hours)
- dscout: \$125 (2 studies)
- MTurk: \$67 (various microtasks)
- **Total: \$287 for approximately 12 hours of work**

4. Virtual Assistance for Small Businesses

Average earnings: \$15-35/hour | Time commitment: Flexible

Small business owners are drowning in administrative tasks. They need someone to manage their inbox, schedule appointments, handle social media, or organize their files. You don't need a degree—you need reliability.

Why Demand Is Exploding

The number of small businesses in America hit **33.2 million in 2025**. Most can't afford full-time employees but desperately need part-time help. Virtual assistants fill that gap perfectly.

Services You Can Offer (Even as a Beginner)

- **Email management** - Responding to inquiries, filtering spam, organizing inbox
- **Calendar management** - Scheduling meetings, sending reminders
- **Social media posting** - Using scheduling tools like Buffer or Later
- **Data entry** - Organizing spreadsheets, updating CRM systems
- **Customer service** - Responding to basic questions via chat or email

How to Land Your First Client

Step 1: Create a simple profile on:
 - **Belay** - VA placement agency

- **Time Etc** - UK-based, excellent reputation
- **Upwork** - Freelance marketplace

Step 2: Start with a low rate (\$12-15/hour) to build testimonials.

Step 3: After 3-5 positive reviews, raise your rates to market value (\$20-35/hour).

Tools You'll Need (All Free)

- **Google Workspace** - Email, calendar, documents
- **Trello or Asana** - Task management
- **Slack** - Client communication
- **Canva** - Basic graphics
- **LastPass** - Password management

The Income Trajectory

- Month 1-2: \$400-600 (building reputation)
- Month 3-6: \$800-1,200 (raising rates)
- Month 6+: \$1,500-3,000 (multiple clients, specialized skills)

5. Content Writing for Blogs and Businesses

Average earnings: \$0.05-0.50/word | Time commitment: Flexible

Every website needs content. Blog posts, product descriptions, email newsletters, social media captions—the demand is endless. And here's the secret: you don't need to be a professional writer. You need to be clear, reliable, and willing to learn.

The Market Opportunity

Content marketing is a **\$600 billion industry**. Businesses publish 7.5 million blog posts daily. They can't write all that content themselves.

Starting Without a Portfolio

Step 1: Write 3-5 sample articles on topics you know (your hobby, your job, your interests).

Step 2: Publish them on Medium or LinkedIn to create a portfolio.

Step 3: Apply to content mills to gain experience:

- **Textbroker** - Pays \$0.01-0.05/word
- **Contently** - Higher quality, better pay
- **Verblo** - Blog-focused

Step 4: After 10-20 articles, pitch directly to businesses at higher rates.

Niches That Pay Premium Rates

Niche	Rate per Word	Why
Finance	\$0.25-0.75	Expertise required
Healthcare	\$0.20-0.50	Accuracy critical
Technology	\$0.15-0.40	Fast-changing field
Legal	\$0.30-0.60	Specialized knowledge
B2B SaaS	\$0.20-0.50	High-value clients

My Recommended Path

1. **Weeks 1-2:** Write samples, set up profiles
2. **Weeks 3-4:** Complete 5-10 low-paid assignments for experience
3. **Month 2:** Pitch to businesses directly at \$0.10/word
4. **Month 3+:** Specialize in a niche, raise rates to \$0.20+/word

Putting It All Together: Your Action Plan

Week 1:

- Sign up for UserTesting, Prolific, and one survey platform
- Complete your first 5 app tests
- Research print-on-demand niches

Week 2:

- Create 5 print-on-demand designs
- List them on Redbubble (free, no upfront cost)
- Write 2 sample articles for your portfolio

Week 3:

- Apply to 3 virtual assistant platforms
- Join Textbroker or Verblip
- Track all earnings in a spreadsheet

Week 4:

- Review what's working
- Double down on your top performer
- Set a monthly income goal

The Bottom Line

You don't need to quit your job. You don't need startup capital. You don't need special skills. What you need is to start.

Pick one side hustle from this list. Give it 30 days of consistent effort. Track your results. Then decide if you want to scale it or try something else.

The people earning real money from side hustles aren't necessarily smarter or more talented. They just started sooner.

Your move.

Want to dive deeper into any of these side hustles? Check out our detailed guides on [app testing strategies](/posts/app-testing-guide) (/posts/app-testing-guide) and [print-on-demand success](/posts/print-on-demand-guide) (/posts/print-on-demand-guide).

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